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ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 31 October 1995 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit, in the annex below, information from the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the effects of sanctions on the environment in the Federal Republic.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 96.

(Signed) Vladislav JOVANOVIC
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

THE EFFECT OF SANCTIONS ON THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA

More than three years have passed since the time when, without any legal and factual basis, sanctions of the United Nations Security Council were imposed against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In the situation when the levels of earnings and the standard of living are very low, when even the basic needs for food, accommodation and clothing are difficult to meet, it is more and more difficult for the citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to devote attention to environmental quality and protection.

The levels of air, water and soil pollution have increased. The use of natural resources has intensified, even of those under a special protection regime. There is a growing risk of jeopardizing natural and cultural goods, and the willingness and capability of society to invest in environmental protection and improvement have diminished.

Due to the reduced budgetary inflow, there is danger that the environmental quality control and monitoring system and the environmental protection system at large might collapse.

In the longer run, environmental consequences might get even worse, considering that the country, lagging behind in economic, scientific and technological terms, will require a much longer time to adjust to the norms and standards which the modern world has already adopted or opted for.

There is danger that, due to scientific/technological backwardness, the Federal Republic may experience a period of "ecologic blockade" after the sanctions are lifted, because its economy will not be ready to meet the demands of the markets of developed countries who are the Republic's main trade partners.

Since the Republic has been prevented from trading with the world and from procuring energy sources in particular, its economic enterprises and citizens are compelled to use their own energy sources which, because of their polluted contents, increasingly deteriorate the overall quality of the environment. For the purposes of meeting energy requirements, the use of wood has risen, resulting in an increasing level of forest degradation and disturbed biological balance in vast areas. Intensified erosion has affected all types of hydro-reservoirs and caused a long-term change in the hydrological regime, including the international flow of the Danube river in the area of the Iron Gates reservoir.

Since manufacturing industrial facilities have worn out and the possibilities of their overhaul have been reduced, the emission of pollutants into the environment has increased. The impossibility of importing spare parts has caused a growing risk of damage. The use of low quality fuels and worn-out vehicles in transport contribute to pollution.

Agriculture uses plant protection agents of poor quality, posing a danger of long-term soil degradation and production of food deficient in biological and chemical safety. Due to the deteriorated standard of living, products which frequently fall short of the basic quality standards are used in almost all areas of human life.

An adequate substitution of imported raw materials and intermediaries is not always possible due to technological constraints and inadequate quality of domestic raw materials and intermediaries. This often increases environmental pollution, the consequences of which can exceed the local level. The reduced control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes through Yugoslavia increases the risk of damages and incidents. Illicit trade in hazardous and other wastes is also on the rise.

The break-off of international cooperation is yet another impact of the sanctions. It has been made impossible for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to implement some 50 ratified international conventions relating to the environment. It is especially paradoxical to render impossible the implementation of conventions protecting the environment from transboundary pollutants or conventions of a global nature. The participation of Yugoslav representatives at international gatherings is being contested, and some organizations are even questioning the membership of our country, which is a signatory of international conventions and agreements.

The regional and bilateral cooperation relating to environmental protection has been discontinued, and it is hard to believe that it would be possible to restore it in a short period of time.

Due to the sanctions, international financial support for environmental protection projects has been denied, which will have lasting consequences in terms of development and in terms of improvement of environmental quality. The exclusion of Yugoslavia from international programmes, as well as from cooperation with financial institutions, has already affected environmental protection and improvement in our country.

Scientific and technical cooperation has stopped. Study visits and participation in workshops, as well as the use of information databases within many international and regional organizations, have stopped almost completely. The isolation of the Federal Republic has imposed an almost complete information blockade and interrupted almost all types of communications with international organizations and institutions engaged in environmental protection.

The adverse effect on the overall development of the country has endangered the abundant natural and cultural heritage, including the heritage that has been included in UNESCO's World's Heritage List.

Cooperation in the protection of the Adriatic Sea and water basins has been discontinued, even though these resources are not of interest to the Federal Republic alone but concern neighbourly cooperation and broader regional cooperation as well.

The consequences ensuing from broken relations with the former Yugoslav republics have created a particular problem. There is growing danger of transboundary effects of air and water pollution and especially of the Sava River pollution, and there is likewise a possibility of harmful effects of damages in high-risk plants and facilities. The possibility of endangering the environment as a consequence of war operations on the borders of our country and the risk of abuse and destruction of the environment for war purposes pose a great threat.

In view of the above and bearing in mind its consistently peaceful policy, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia believes that conditions have been met for the normalization of international relations relating to the environment, the more so considering that, formally, sanctions were not even imposed in the area of the environment and should not affect it at all.